

# Heritage and Revolution\*

## I

My title, "Heritage and Revolution," may sound bizarre.

The term *heritage* connotes something conservative, if not something downright reactionary, some organization in the United States. Or else, it brings to mind legal papers, deeds, and notaries.

Revolution, on the other hand, is a term that has been prostituted by the contemporary publicity industry: every now and then, there is a revolution in vacuum cleaners or toilet paper. But in common parlance, between 1789, when La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt used it for the first time in its modern sense, and somewhere around 1950, it meant a radical change, a subversion of the existing, instituted order of things (not to be confused with gun firing or bloodletting).

So my title needs some explanation. Here it is.

I do not think that the game is over. And I do not want the game to be over. I mean the political game, in the grand sense of the term *political*; I am not talking about Mr. Reagan or Mr. Mitterrand. Nor do I have in mind the management of the current affairs of government. By *politics* I mean a collective activity endowed with self-

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reflection and lucidity, aiming at the overall institution of society.

The historical singularity of Western Europe and before it, eighth- to fifth-century Greece, is that they are the societies, and the only ones, to have *created politics* in the sense of a collective activity explicitly aiming at the overall institution of society, explicitly attempting to change it, and succeeding to a substantial extent. In all other societies, we have court intrigues, group rivalries, machinations, open competitions, complicated games to obtain power—but these are always *within* the existing, instituted framework. In Ancient Greece and in Western Europe (including, of course, the United States) we have *politics*.

Considered this way, politics is a moment and an expression of the project of autonomy; it does not accept passively and blindly what is already there, what has been instituted, but calls it into question. Now, what is called into question may be the "constitution" or a body of law. It can also be the prevailing collective representation about world, society, truth, or values. In the latter case, the calling into question is, of course, philosophy in the pristine sense. The creation of politics and the creation of philosophy, as expressions of the project of autonomy, go together, and together indeed they have gone in actual history, both in Greece and in Western Europe.

These expressions of the project of autonomy also take on, almost immediately, the *content* of autonomy. The Greek *politai* {citizens}, or the European *bourgeois*, did not set out to change institutions simply in order to manifest their capacity to do so. Rather, they tried to bring about a state of affairs entailing the beginning of the realization of social and individual autonomy. This is the *democratic* component of their political activity and of the

resulting institutions. (The same can be said, *mutatis mutandis*, about philosophy as realization of intellectual and psychical freedom, but this is not our present object.)

What this means is that *our* heritage, *our* tradition, is the democratic heritage and the revolutionary tradition in their strictest senses. So much about the coexistence of these two words in my title.

Such things can of course be seen differently, even from an opposing view. It could be argued that our heritage is just what is there, that there is nothing more to be done except to manage its legacy, to take care of this fortune, large or small. We should be clear, however, about the consequences of this position. The central part of our heritage lies in making our institutions; we can change them, and we ought to change them if we think fit. Now, the assertion that we have nothing to change, at least nothing important, that there is nothing to do beyond the day-to-day legislation and management of the Congress or Parliament, is tantamount to the statement that things are perfectly satisfactory as they are, that we have reached the highest attainable state of society or, at any rate, the least imperfect one. It is saying, in other words, that our society is such that any attempt to change its institution will inevitably bring about something worse. As is well known, this position has been argued explicitly {since at least the mid-seventies}.

One has only to open one's eyes to dismiss this view. Regardless of whether one is "satisfied" or "dissatisfied," the existing state of affairs is untenable in the long run because it is self-destructive, and by this I mean self-destructive *politically*. It produces a growing glacier of privatization and apathy; it dislocates the social imaginary significations that hold institutions together. An apathetic and cynical society cannot maintain for long

even the few liberal institutions existing today. And a society of liberal institutions based upon the relentless pursuit of individual self-interest is sheer nonsense.

Another suggestion has surfaced in the last few years, that we have come to live under a new form of "democratic politics," made up of a juxtaposition of various "social movements"—or rather, nonmovements—none of which would be concerned with envisaging society as a whole, but whose additive synergy, rather, would work to produce a "democratic" state of affairs. It is not difficult to see that these "movements," stripped of general concerns, take inevitably the form of lobbies, the mutually opposed pressures of which currently contribute to the stalemates of society on substantive issues. Recent developments have amply illustrated this point.

A final preliminary remark. Formulations that suggest, for example, that the ideas of the Enlightenment have not yet been fully implemented are defective in more than one way. Our heritage goes far beyond the *Aufklärung*, and has not been, to say the least, exhaustively "recapitulated" by it. The Enlightenment itself, very important as it is, forms only one phrase in the symphonic creation of the project of autonomy. Many important things have happened since the *Aufklärung* that are not limited to the implementation of its ideas. Above all, if and when a new period of political activity oriented toward autonomy begins, it will carry us far beyond not only the *Aufklärung* but also beyond anything else we are now able to imagine.

## II

In order to minimize misunderstandings, I should now make clear some of my further presuppositions.

Human history is creation. It is, first and foremost, wholesale self-creation, the separation of humanity from sheer animality, a separation at once never complete and abyssal. This self-creation manifests itself through the positing of unprecedented new forms of being, without precedents, "models," or "causes" in the presocial world. Such forms of being are: language, tools, instituted rules, meanings, types of individuals, and so on. Such are also the particular overall forms society takes on in different times and places: Tupí-Guaraní or Hebrew, Greek or Medieval European, Assyrian or capitalistic bureaucratic.

These elemental facts—the self-creation of humanity, the self-institution of societies—are, almost always, almost everywhere, veiled; they are concealed from society by its very institution. And almost always, almost everywhere, this institution contains the instituted representation of its own extrasocial origin. The *heteronomous* character of the institution of society consists in the fact that the social law is not posited as created by society but is seen, rather, as having a source beyond the reach of living human beings. This is the root of the religious character of the institution of almost all known societies—and likewise of the almost unbreakable link between religion and heteronomy. The institution of society has found both the guarantee of its validity and its protection against internal contestation and external relativization through the instituted representation of an extrasocial origin for itself.<sup>1</sup> "God has given us our laws,

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<sup>1</sup>See "Institution of Society and Religion" (1982), in *WIF*.

how could you dare change them?"

Every institution of society aims at its perpetuation. And it generally succeeds in creating appropriate means for this, since human beings can only exist insofar as they are socialized, i.e., humanized, by the social institution, and in the ways this institution posits, which are conformal to it and tend to reproduce it indefinitely. To put it another way, newborn bipeds only become social individuals through internalizing the existing social institutions.

This should have entailed that a social order, once created and barring external factors, would last for ever. We know that this is not so. More precisely, we know that although this was *almost* the case for a very long time, it then ceased to be so. We know that there have been many extraordinarily different societies and that they are all to some degree historical in the proper sense, that is, self-altering. I shall now describe briefly two important types of this self-alteration, that is, historicity.

First, as far as we know, some degree of self-alteration, however small or slow, seeps through in all societies. Language offers perhaps the most striking example of this. Every day several anonymous and untraceable changes are introduced into the English language as it is spoken, say, in the United States, in the guise of new slang words, semantic shifts, and so on. This same thing has been going on with a slower tempo for thousands of years in "primitive" or "savage" societies as well as in "traditional" societies such as peasant societies under "Asiatic despotism" or European peasant societies, especially those in Eastern Europe, up to the twentieth century.

This minute but continual self-alteration will persist as long as there are human beings and societies, for it has to do with the nature of human beings as well as that of social institutions. If institutions were made of iron, they

would still be subject to alteration, but not *self*-alteration; rather, like iron, they would rust. If they were made of rational ideas, they would last for ever. But institutions are actually made of sanctioned social meanings and procedures for giving meaning. These meanings are at heart imaginary—not "rational," not "functional," not "reflections of reality"—they are *social imaginary significations*. They can be effective, and effectively alive, only so long as they are invested ("cathected") and lived by human beings. The same is true of the procedures for the sanction of these meanings.

Human beings are essentially defined, not by being "reasonable," but by being possessed with a radical imagination. It is this imagination that has to be tamed and brought under control through social fabrication, but such taming never fully succeeds, as witnessed by the existence of *transgression* in all known societies. Thus, the life and the activities of innumerable human beings continually introduce infinitesimal alterations in the ways of doing things as well as in the manner of effectively living, or "interpreting" (re-creating for themselves), the instituted social imaginary significations. As a result, a slow—and, of course, nonconscious—self-alteration is always in process in actual social life. This self-alteration is almost always the object of an occultation on the part of the exist-ing institutions of society in the same way and for the same "reasons" that the creative dimension of self-institution is such an object. The occultation of self-institution (of the self-creation of society) and of self-alteration (of the historicity of society) are two faces of society's heteronomy.

The second type of self-alteration, leaving aside the extremely important class of "intermediate" cases consisting in relatively swift but fully blind social change,

concerns the periods of rapid and important societal self-alteration in which an intense collective activity, endowed with a minimal degree of lucidity, is successfully aimed at changing institutions. Such periods manifest another mode of being of the social-historical, the explicit calling into question of its laws of existence and the corresponding work toward their lucid transformation. These periods I would call revolutionary. In this sense I speak of a revolutionary period in the Greek world from the eighth to the fifth century B.C.E., and in Western Europe from, say, the thirteenth century onwards. During these two periods the project of social and individual autonomy was created, thanks to which creation we can today think and speak as we do.

### III

I come now to the idea of a revolution as an explicit political project—or, rather, as a dense period of time within which a radical political project takes hold upon social reality.

What does *radical* mean in this context? Of course, the idea of a *total* revolution, of the creation of a social *tabula rasa*, is absurd. In the most radical revolution imaginable, the elements of social life that would remain unaltered are immensely more numerous than are those that might be changed: language, buildings, tools, ways of behaving and doing, and, the most important, heavy parts of the sociopsychical structure of human beings.

This can be seen as a great *fact* which, made explicit, sounds like a truism. But it can and must also be seen as a crucial problem for political action.

This problem, as far as we know, was raised explicitly for the first time by Plato. Given what humans



are, which means, for Plato, given that human beings are utterly and hopelessly corrupt, how is it possible to make the desired changes; and, in particular, *who* is going to bring them about?

Plato's answer in the *Republic* is well known: Philosophers ought to become kings, or kings philosophers. Plato himself considers both eventualities very unlikely.

Plato's position is unacceptable for us, or at least, to me. Certainly, to call Plato a totalitarian is to misuse and abuse terms—it is even silly. It is also wrong to call him a conservative: what he intended was not at all the conservation of an existing state of affairs or the return to some previous one. Any decent Athenian conservative would recoil with horror at Plato's proposals regarding property and women and children. Rather, Plato aimed to arrest the movement of history (this can be more clearly seen in the *Laws*); and the hidden, certainly not fully conscious, presupposition behind his political attitude and his bitter hatred of democracy was the understanding that history is the work of the human collectivity. Once you give free rein to the will of the many and to its expression, then *genesis*—change and becoming (the negation of true Being)—and its concomitant decay set in.

Nevertheless, the diagnosis of the problem was correct, and its formulation remained, by and large, the same during the subsequent millennia. How can you change society if both the actors and the instruments of change are living individuals, that is, the very embodiment of that which is to be changed? Accordingly, Rousseau could write in the second half of the eighteenth century, "*Celui qui ose entreprendre d'instituer un peuple doit se sentir en état de changer, pour ainsi dire, la nature humaine* (The one who dares to endeavor to institute a people must feel himself capable of changing, so to speak, human

nature)."<sup>2</sup> It is true that in this passage Rousseau deals explicitly with the question of a "first" institution. But the whole of his political writings shows that he is at grips with Plato's problem. To give institutions to a people one has to change, first of all, the *mores*, the *Sitten*, the ways of being of the people. Without such a change, the new institutions are useless and cannot even function. But it is precisely in order to bring about change in these ways of being, in these *mores*, that new institutions are required.<sup>3</sup> Rousseau, like Plato, like Machiavelli, like Montesquieu, like all great thinkers (and in contradistinction to recent political theorists) was very lucid on this point. There cannot be a "political" institution that is not, from top to bottom, from its most superficial to its deepest level, linked to the *mores*, the *Sitten*, the whole anthropological, sociopsychical structure of the people living in that society.

Let us dwell a bit longer on Rousseau's statement, "The one who dares to endeavor to institute a people," to give institutions to a people. . . . Behind this formulation, one sees the image, the figure, and the story of "the" legislator, and the canonical list originating already with Machiavelli: Moses, Theseus, Lycurgus, Numa, . . . . Now, Rousseau is a deep thinker, and, in a sense, a democrat. Why then does he think only of *celui qui* . . . , *the one who* . . . , as a subject of action, and of the people, *le peuple*, as a *passive object* of this action, an object that

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<sup>2</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, book 2, chapter 7, in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), vol. 3, p. 381. A similar formulation can be found already in the first version of the *Contrat*, book 2, chapter 2, *ibid.*, p. 313.

<sup>3</sup>See also Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, chapter 1.

has to be *formed* ("*formed*" is the precise term in the first version of the *Contrat*: "*celui qui se croit capable de former un peuple . . .*"), formed by the active legislator not only in terms of a narrowly conceived political constitution but also with respect to its *mores*, its ways of feeling, thinking, doing, and being? That Plato could speak in these terms is understandable. Regardless of any contradiction that this view might have with his ideas about the human being or the soul, he firmly believes that the people are rabble, and he says so repeatedly. But Rousseau?

One could argue that Rousseau is very pessimistic, indeed gloomy, about the people of his time and about human nature in general. Contrary to the widespread, popular misunderstanding, this was indeed the truth of the matter—and, as we know, events rapidly proved him wrong (the *Contrat social* was published in 1762; Rousseau died in 1778). What is more important and deeper is the fact that the common ground on which Plato and Rousseau stand is the philosophical equivalent of the imaginary of heteronomy. Both Plato and Rousseau would recognize that people have been active in bringing about the obtaining state of political affairs. But they would also be quick to point out that it is a bad, corrupted state of affairs—and necessarily so. Framed in these terms the aporia has no solution; indeed, this is what Rousseau says in the first paragraph of chapter 7, book 2, of the *Contrat*: "*il faudroit des Dieux pour donner des loix aux hommes* (Gods would be required to give laws to humans),"<sup>4</sup> an echo of Plato's *God is the measure of all things*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>*Du contrat social*, p. 381.

<sup>5</sup>Plato *Laws* 716c. Plato's phrase is, of course, a direct challenge to Protagoras' famous saying, "Man is the measure of all things." —T/E

People, and history, can bring forward something "new"—but only in the sense of *destruction*, of *decay*, of a *less good* state of affairs. By virtue of the Platonic conflation of Being and Good, *less good* means also *less being*, *hētton on*. Thus, such a "new" is new by virtue of a deficit or negation and therefore not truly new.

In the view of the heteronomously instituted society, the laws are not created by man. According to Plato, and most philosophers, the laws are made by humans, and that is precisely why they are so bad. They ought to be the reflection (or translation, or whatever) of a superhuman order, mediated by an "exceptional" being<sup>6</sup> and protected against human attempts at their alteration by a "noble lie," the fable of their divine origin.<sup>7</sup>

But the trails of Rousseau and Plato, because they are radical thinkers, lead to the heart of the matter. Let us reformulate the idea in question as: "one who wants to institute a people has to change the *mores* of the people." But who does, in actual historical fact, change the *mores* of peoples? The answer is obvious: The peoples themselves. Thus we have at least a formal answer to our question. If there is to be a true change in institutions, it must be accompanied by a deeply consonant change in *mores*. Changes in *mores* are brought about by the people. So, the only assurance for this consonance is that the people be as active in bringing about the political (formal institutional) change as they are in changing their *mores* (though, of course, in a different way).

We may recall that Marx confronts this same question in the third of his *Theses on Feuerbach*: "The

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<sup>6</sup>For Rousseau, see the whole of chapter 7 of book 2 of the *Contrat*.

<sup>7</sup>*Republic* 414b-c; same position in Rousseau, *ibid.*, p. 383.

materialist theory of the change in circumstances and of education forgets that circumstances are changed by man and that the educator must be himself educated. . . . The coincidence of the change in circumstances and of human activity can be rationally considered and understood only as revolutionary praxis."<sup>8</sup> In other words, the old aporia that human beings are conditioned by the existing state of affairs and that this state cannot be changed except by their actions. But why should human beings want to (and could they?) change this state of affairs, if they are conditioned by it to function in conformity with it? Marx's answer, "revolutionary praxis," appears verbal. But it means that people change by changing the circumstances in which they find themselves.

Things will become, I hope, more clear if we use the ideas I introduced before. It is through the same historical process that people change "anthropologically," that is, change their *mores* and sociopsychical organization, and change also the (formal) institution of society. It might appear that all of the elements required for the solution of our problem presuppose one another and that we find ourselves caught in a vicious circle. This is a circle, but it is not "vicious," for it is the circle of

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<sup>8</sup>The English translation in the text appears to be Castoriadis's own, though he may have used an unsourced French or English translation. Here is how the International Publishers' English translation reads: "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating. . . . The coincidence of the changing circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionising practice*" (Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works In One Volume* [New York: International Publishers, 1968], p. 28). —T/E

historical creation. Did the Greek *politai* create the *polis* or the *polis* the *politai*? This is a meaningless question precisely because the *polis* could only have been created by the action of human beings who were by the same token transforming themselves into *politai*.

But why and how, one may ask, do people start changing themselves and their institutions? And why is it that they do not do so all the time?

We have, in a sense, already answered this question. Human history is creation. We can elucidate this creation in some of its general characteristics, or in its concrete content, after it has happened. But we can neither "explain" nor "predict" it, because it is not determined; it, rather, is determinant. Likewise, its tempo and rhythm are themselves part of the creation. It is only in an external, descriptive sense that historical processes take place in measurable, homogeneous calendar time. Intrinsically, in its concrete content and texture, the time of a historical epoch is an integral part of the creation this epoch *is*, congruent with its deepest imaginary significations. That Greek time, or Western European time, differs deeply from Trobriand or Pharaonic Egyptian time hardly needs stressing, but it requires, indeed, thinking.

It is useful to revert for a moment to Marx, for he has been till now the most explicit thinker of revolution. I cannot enter here into the ambiguities and antinomies of Marx's thought, which I have discussed many times.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>See chapter 1 (1964) of *IIS*. See also François Furet, *Marx and the French Revolution* (1986), trans. Deborah Kan Furet, with selections from Karl Marx edited and introduced by Lucien Calvié (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). A work on Marx's concrete analyses of other historical transitions, in the light of the problematic formulated here, would be very helpful. His ambiguities concerning

Despite the third *Thesis on Feuerbach* quoted above, and similar formulations, when it comes to his main preoccupation, the socialist revolution, Marx is unable to maintain the irreducibility of praxis; to put it more sharply, he proves unable to see its creative character, looking instead for solid causes, that is, guarantees, of and for revolution. The direct result is that he pays scant attention to the problems of political action and organization proper. Instead he looks for economic "laws" that would somehow engineer the collapse of capitalism. This, of course, even if true, would be irrelevant and useless: there is nothing to ensure that a collapse of capitalism would be followed by socialism rather than fascism, the *Iron Heel*, 1984, or cannibalism.<sup>10</sup>

More to the point are his attempts to find in capitalist circumstances the conditions for the creation of a "revolutionary class": not just a class striving to overthrow the system but a class capable, after this overthrow, of establishing a new society with a fully "positive" character; in Marx's terminology, first the "inferior," then the "superior" phase of communism. This class is the proletariat or the working class. But why should this be so?

One can find three kinds of answers to this question in Marx:

- the proletariat is subject, under capitalism, to total alienation or absolute deprivation; it is a pure negation which therefore can only produce the absolutely positive. This Christiano-Hegelian posi-

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the French Revolution receive an excellent analysis in Furet's book.

<sup>10</sup>*The Iron Heel*, a novel by Jack London published in 1907 in which one could see a premonition of the rise of fascism. —French trans.

tion has to be dismissed straightaway as factually erroneous, logically nonsensical, politically inconsistent, and philosophically arbitrary.

■ "laws of history" demand that after capitalism there follows an "end of history" or, rather, an end of "prehistory." This is communism. The proletariat will therefore be "historically compelled, in conformity with its being" to do whatever is necessary to bring about the new society (*The Holy Family*).<sup>11</sup> This arbitrary eschatology does not need to be discussed, either.

■ capitalist circumstances, especially work and life in the factory and in working-class neighborhoods, *positively instill* into the proletariat a new mentality consisting of solidarity, practicality, soberness of mind, depth of understanding, "humanity," and so on, which is intrinsically homogeneous with and appropriate to the new society to be established. In other words, capitalist circumstances produce not only a working class but, in the person of this class, a new anthropological type and a new sociopsychical structure, which are the necessary conditions for the production, in turn, of a new society. Capitalist circumstances change human beings in such a way that they will in turn change circumstances in the wished-for direction.

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<sup>11</sup>This quotation from Marx and Engels' *The Holy Family*, here given in Castoriadis's own English-language translation, is discussed at length in Castoriadis's key 1973 essay, "The Question of the History of the Workers' Movement," *PSW3*, beginning on p. 159. On page 202n.2 of that text, the standard English-language reference was given as follows: *The Holy Family*, in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 4 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 37. —T/E



For a series of reasons, the most compelling of which is the huge quantitative decline of the proletariat in its Marxian sense, this discussion might appear to have only historical interest. In fact, it brings us back to the center of our theoretical and political preoccupations.

Marx was correct, to a considerable degree, in diagnosing a change in the sociopsychical structure of the working class. In the main capitalist countries, the working class in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries behaved and acted in a way no other exploited and dominated class had ever behaved and acted before. This was not the "product" of "circumstances" but truly the self-creation of the working class as a class and as an active factor in capitalist society. The passage from a proletariat "in itself" to a proletariat "for itself" was not (and is not) "necessary," nor was it *determined* by the objective conditions of life and work under capitalism. It was the British, the French, the German, and then the American workers who struggled to free themselves from illiteracy, to acquire, shape, and spread political ideas, to organize, to formulate, and finally to impose demands aimed at altering their "circumstances."<sup>12</sup> And it is only *some*, and not *all*, working classes in capitalist countries that showed similar performances.

Now, the difference between, say, English workers of the early nineteenth century and Brazilian workers until 1964 (or, for that matter, today's English workers) is certainly not a reflection of genetic disparities. Partly, this difference is just there, and unexplainable. But partly also, if we want to understand it, we must take into account the dissimilarities in *historical* endowment, in the total

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<sup>12</sup>I have argued this point at length in "The Question of the History of the Workers' Movement."

"circumstances" of the countries involved, including their political traditions, *beyond* the establishment of capitalism.

The fact is that the first, most important, inaugural, and instituting steps in the workers' movement took place in countries where a tradition of struggle against oppressive authority in favor of popular regimes, in favor of freedom of thought and inquiry, was part of the historical sediment. Once started in these countries, the movement could and did spread elsewhere—though not, emphatically not, everywhere, not with these characteristics, despite "capitalist circumstances."

The workers' movement in the "European" (*lato sensu*) countries created itself. But it was able to do this on the basis of the heritage, the tradition of democratic movement it found in the history of these countries, the reference to the social-historical project of autonomy, born within the "European" world. It is therefore also fully comprehensible that before its bureaucratic degeneracy (whether social-democratic or Bolshevik), the workers' movement created institutions of a deeply democratic character, some of which go beyond the forms of the bourgeois democratic movement and resurrect long-forgotten principles embedded in ancient Greek institutions, such as the rotation of people in posts of responsibility within the British trade unions of the first period, the importance of sovereign general assemblies of all concerned, and the permanent revocability of delegates instaurated by the Paris Commune and revived or rediscovered every time workers formed autonomous organs, like Councils (as they did again in Hungary in 1956). The radical demands of the workers' movement concerning the ownership of the means of production belong to the same sphere of signification. Democracy entails the equal sharing of power, and equal possibilities

of participation in the process of political decision-making. This is, of course, impossible when individuals, groups, or managerial bureaucracies control centers of huge economic power, which, especially under modern conditions, immediately translates into political power.

#### IV

Our heritage, our tradition, includes many contradictory elements. Our history has created democracy—but it is also the only history to have created totalitarianism. The Athenians are accountable both for *Antigone* and for the dreadful massacre of the Melians.

But our tradition has also created freedom in another sense: the possibility of and the responsibility for *choosing*. Choosing is a political act at the basis even of philosophy, properly speaking. To enter philosophical activity one has to choose for thinking and against revelation, for unlimited interrogation and against blind acceptance of what has been inherited.

Our heritage contains antinomic elements. And it contains the possibility of and the responsibility for choice. This entails freedom in a sense much deeper than the "constitutional" one. When reading Thucydides, one never sees the Athenians complaining that their plights are brought on by God's wrath; they recognize in them the results of their own decisions and actions. Neither, I hope, would people in the democratic tradition today seek extrasocial causes for their collective predicaments.

In this heritage, we choose the project of individual and collective autonomy, for an endless series of reasons, but ultimately because *we will it*, and all that goes with it. All that goes with it: that is, the best in our culture, as we know it.

Will is not "voluntarism." Will is the conscious dimension of what we are as beings defined by radical imagination, that is, defined as potentially creative beings.

To will autonomy entails willing some types of institution of society and opposing others. But it entails also willing a type of historical existence, a type of relation to the past and to the future. Both of them, relation to the past and relation to the future, have to be re-created.

Today the relation to the past is either through cheap touristic archeology or by erudition and study of Museums of various sorts. We must oppose pseudomodernity and pseudosubversion—the "*tabula rasa*" ideology—as well as eclecticism ("postmodernism") or servile adoration of the past. A new relation to the past means that we revive the past as our own *and* as independent of us; it entails being able to discuss with it as well as to let ourselves be questioned by it. Here again perhaps the relation of fifth-century Athenians to their past offers itself *not* as a model, but as a germ, as an index of actualized possibilities. Tragedy does not "repeat" the myths; it reelaborates and transforms them so that they, originating in a past immemorial, can vest themselves in language and the forms of the most vivid present, thereby addressing human beings in all possible futures. This uncanny "dialogue" with the past, two one-way runs apparently disjointed and yet actually not so at all, is one of the most precious possibilities our history has created for us. In the same way that we ought to recognize in individuals, groups, in ethnic or other units their true alterity, and organize our coexistence with them on the basis of this recognition, we must recognize in our own past an inexhaustible source of proximate alterity, a surface of rebound for our endeavors and a line of resistance to our always imminent folly.

And we have to establish a new relation to the future, to stop seeing it as an indefinite "progress" giving us ever more of the same, or as the locus of undefined explosions. Neither should we bracket our relation to the future with the disingenuous term *utopia*. Beyond the so-called possibilities of the present, fascination with which can only generate repetition, we must, without abandoning judgment, dare to will a future—not *any* future: not a blue print, but this ever unforeseeable, ever creative unfolding, in the shaping of which we can participate, working and struggling, for and against.